

KINGSHIP AND COSMOLOGICAL ORDER: THE ROYAL COURT OF TENKODOGO¹

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Tenkodogo, a township situated in the south-eastern part of Burkina Faso on the road leading from the capital Ouagadougou to the Togo border, has approximately 29,000 inhabitants. It is Burkina's seventh largest town and is the location of the regional government of the Boulgou-Province. This regional government is represented by a high-commissioner and a "préfet" as it is the residence of a traditional ruler, otherwise known as Tenkodogo-*naaba*. His sphere of influence covers many villages and hamlets in the region: in total he is the sovereign of nearly 120,000 people. The power of the traditional rulers was curtailed first by the arrival and following overrule of the French colonialists and then after independence by Sankara and his revolutionary government. The kings ceased to be the ultimate judges who were able to determine life and death of their subjects. Henceforth they were no longer allowed to recruit subjects for certain work on their fields, and they no longer could claim control over the allocation of resources. Their position was strengthened anew by Sankara's successor in office, Blaise Campaore, who quickly recognized that collaborating with the traditional rulers could only be of advantage: in fact they later proved to be his best supporters in the election campaign.

That was mainly because concerning religion, their influence remained relatively untouched. The king of Tenkodogo still acts as the living representative of the life and the fertility of the land and its people. It is he who guarantees that the rains fall abundantly and are well distributed during the course of the year; furthermore he is responsible for the cohesiveness of the society and the absence of misfortune of any kind. On his shoulders lies the responsibility for the well-being of his subjects, in other words ensuring that all have enough to eat and are well contented. Therefore, the presently ruling Tenkodogo-*naaba* chose the following maxim³ upon entering office:

¹ This paper was given in a slightly different German version during the celebration of the city-partnership between Satonévri (Burkina Faso) and Viernheim (Germany). Theoretical problems concerning the different forms of African kingship are not discussed. I thank John Middleton and Sascha Lenhart who read a first draft of the English version.

² Aloys worked with me during three stays in the region. His acquaintance with people as well as his ethnological interests were a great help. He died suddenly and much too soon this spring.

³ *zab-yuuure*, literally translated "war name", cf. PACERE, 1991:18-20; IZARD 1985:63-64.

"*tigre yām zaka kām̃bi lar mogela*" - "as long as there is food in abundance the children can laugh", shortened to Naaba Tigre. The king's office is not only charged with high responsibility, but due to the many regulations and duties surrounding his person it is both burdensome and costly. Naaba Tigre is able to meet these duties because he inherited large cattle-herds from his father. Additionally he owns several fields in the region⁴, and it seems that he has other revenues, as for example rents from a house in Ouagadougou.

Naaba Tigre belongs to the Mosi people, the largest and most influential ethnic group in Burkina Faso. A census of the year 1970 indicates that out of a total population of 5 million, 2,5 million inhabitants were "Mosi", over 50%.⁵ The ancestors of the "Mosi" arrived at the beginning of the 15th century⁶ as small bands of warriors. They forced the existing politically unstructured village-communities to accept their dominion. By this they transformed the formerly unstructured groups into a hierarchically organised society with a king (*rima*) at its head. However, these "Mosi" never founded a single state. Today many Mosi-kingdoms still exist in Burkina. The best known are Ouagadougou (with the *moro-naaba* as head) in the centre, Yatenga (with the capital Ouahigouya) in the North and Tenkodogo in the south-east, considered, on falsely interpreted ideological grounds, to be the eldest of all Mosi-kingdoms.⁷ Generally all Mosi refer to a common ancestry. Myth recalls Gambaga, a town in modern northern Ghana, as the cradle of their ancestors. In the 18th century Gambaga rose to be an important trading-centre. To entertain relations with this influential place must have seemed appropriate at a certain time in history. The myth of origin states that a chief of Gambaga, a Dagomba named Gbewa, had a daughter called Yɛnenga. Yɛnenga led her father's warriors into battle braver than his boldest men. Admiring her courage, he held her in high esteem. However, he admired her less in her role as a woman, and it seems that he made no efforts to find her a suitable husband. One day Yɛnenga, upset by her father's behaviour, stole his horse on whose back she fled to the North. She was nearly dying of thirst in the bush when she came to the hut of an elephant hunter. By this Riare, said-to be the son of a "Mande chief", Yɛnenga conceived a son. This boy was named Wedraogo (stallion) by his mother, thus honouring the horse which enabled her to escape her father's dominion.⁸ Wedraogo as well as his male descendants are considered to have been the founders of the different Mosi kingdoms. In the following centuries they and their followers conquered large parts of the region, submitting its former population to their rule. They intermarried with daughters of the ancient land-owners and thereby established kinship-relations with their military inferiors. The ancestors in

⁴ cf. KAWADA, 1979:217

⁵ cf. SOME, 1970:5; IZARD, 1992:8

⁶ cf. IZARD, 1992:8

⁷ KAWADA, 1979:66; cf. TIENDRÉBÉOGO 1964:83

⁸ cf. KAWADA, 1979:76, 312-317

their role as "dynastic heroes"⁹, who had been male strangers and invaders, were accepted by local land-holding groups by virtue of their exotic origin.¹⁰ Soon their number increased. Due to the influence of various culturally different groups with whom they intermingled, the "Mosi" never formed a single homogenous society. As in other areas, successive Mosi bands of warriors arrived as conquerors in the Tenkodogo region. But in contrast to the modern ideology which considers Tenkodogo (derived by a false etymology from *tenga*, *land*, and *kudgu*, *old*) as the eldest of all Mosi kingdoms, it seems that Tenkodogo has emerged relatively late in time, that is in the middle or the second half of the 17th century.¹¹ Previously, the leaders of the different bands and clans built their more temporary residences at various sites, but there was no real centre.¹²

The original inhabitants of the Tenkodogo region were mainly Bisa (Bousanse). They lived in loosely structured village communities that were militarily unable to resist the better equipped horse-riding invaders, who gradually occupied large parts of the territory. In the middle of the 18th century, during the reign of Naaba Baogo, they finally subjugated the southern Bisa of Loanga and Bane and so reached their greatest territorial influence before the penetration of the French.¹³ At the same time the office of the *samand-naaba* (*samande*: in front, exterior court), as second "minister" of the king, was established at the court.¹⁴ The office of the *samand-naaba* is traditionally held by a member of the Kere clan originating from Loanga. Part of the family was settled at Tenkodogo fairly close to the court. The office of the so-called *dapore-naaba* (*dapore*: behind¹⁵) or "prime-minister", is traditionally held by a branch of the Balima clan, partly former slaves who later occupied all important offices at the court. They possibly also had Bisa origins and were probably taken as war prisoners. They became the first vassals of the Mosi warrior kings. As such they were settled in a north-eastern quarter of town called *daporin* (which seems equivalent to *bingo* in the northern Mosi states¹⁶). The "prisoners" seem to have accepted the language and customs of their rulers. They were permitted access to the inner palace and even could approach the king's wives because they had no right to claim the office at the head of the state. Therefore they occupied marked positions of trust, as such playing an important political and ritual role.¹⁷ They created a counter-balance to the relatives of high rank who were (and are) always

⁹ SAHLINS, 1992:16

¹⁰ FEELEY-HARNIK, 1991:208; cf. SCHOTT 1994:154

¹¹ KAWADA 1979: 66; KAWADA, 1985:196

¹² cf. IZARD 1992:13

¹³ KAWADA, 1979:135, 174f.; KAWADA 1985:208

¹⁴ KAWADA, 1979:91

¹⁵ or: "behind the house"; cf. KAWADA 1979:175

¹⁶ IZARD, 1980:63, 106

¹⁷ IZARD 1992:55

considered as the king's inexorable rivals. Moreover, people of Bisa origin accepted, in contrast to the noble Mosi, "to dirty their hands", it being characteristically known of the Mosi that "they do not work, drum, sing or sacrifice". Their vassals were in charge of all these activities, acting as executioners, sacrificers, musicians and so on. Furthermore it was also the vassals who carried out the feared raids and attacks, thereby subjugating the population. The first office in the realm, the above mentioned "prime-minister", is appointed by the king who chooses from those surrounding him the person whom he holds in highest esteem. Both "ministers", *samande* and *dapore*, act as judges under the *naaba*; the *samande*, due to his spatial origin from the South, is generally charged with southern affairs, whereas the *dapore* is mainly concerned with problems of the people of the North. Anyone seeking access to the king has to pass through the intermediaryship of one of his "ministers". The *samande* and the *dapore* were never allowed to leave the realm at the same time, as one of them had always to stay close to the king.

Life in this geographical region is full of hardship. A rich harvest can be affected by many natural factors. Due to an extremely dense population the poor soil has to be exploited in successive years. Fallow land is hard to come by today. This and technically little-developed equipment are reasons why not all the needs of the population can be satisfied. Moreover the scanty livelihood is permanently and seriously threatened by natural catastrophes such as droughts, bad harvests, and in former times, wars. In this environment, where agricultural work is only possible during the rainy season, water generally and the rainfalls especially are crucial factors. If people have to wait too long for the first rains, the millet, as the main cultivated plant, has too little time to ripen. If rainfall, especially at the beginning and the end of the rainy season, in July and September respectively, is extremely heavy, weeds grow abundantly and threaten to crowd out the plants or destroy their flowers before the grain can develop. Additional dangers arise from an unfavourable distribution of rainfall during the course of the year. Often not only the harvest of one year is impaired, but future harvests are menaced as well. If the total rainfall is limited to a few heavy rainstorms, the small soil cover is carried off leading to further erosion. Rainfall therefore can at one time be strongly desired, but at another equally feared.

To deal with these imponderabilities of the natural environment, people had to find a convincing explanation. For the people living in the region, the yearly regeneration of nature and the growing and prospering of the crops are not considered merely a matter of course, but are attributed to the influence of hidden powers, on whose mercy human beings are thought to depend. Men wage a permanent struggle to gain the benevolence of those powers. They try to propitiate them by worship and sacrifices, at the same time trying to avoid anything that could evoke their displeasure. A close and direct relationship is thus maintained to *Napagha Tenga*, the earth-goddess. She not only brings forth the plants on which the survival of the population depends, but in her womb the dead are also buried. Earth and ancestors together are responsible

for terrestrial fruitfulness; they are at the same time guarantors of the fertility of the soil and of the continuity of the human society. Their aim is to ensure perpetuity, and so they judge human behaviour by rewarding the observance of the rules ideology wants to be established and by punishing deviations. These transgressions consist mainly of social offences such as incest, theft, or sexual relations taking place outside the village territory. Sacred places dedicated to the worship of the earth are to be found widely distributed in the area. Some consist of merely an old tree or dense grove, but her abodes are mainly located close to springs or grottoes, considered as openings leading to her realm, the lower world.

The earth is the spouse of the sky from where the male God, *Naaba Wende*, impregnates her womb by sending the strongly desired rain. That means the sky is considered a generative power on whose semen the earth depends to bear fruits. Thus the crops are considered as "children" resulting from the annually consummated union between the sky and the earth.¹⁸ The sky-god himself is a rather remote being, withdrawing himself after having established the world. Only the sun stays close to him¹⁹, whereas all other heavenly phenomena usually associated with the sky - moon, clouds, wind, and even rain and thunder - only exist in relationship to the earth.²⁰ While the earth guarantees the natural and social order, *Naaba Wende* is the upholder of the global world-order. This "cosmological" order, which was created by the skygod, is supported by the king, who is given responsibility for it. His kingship can be said to be based on a divine right. So legitimated, the *rima* stands at the top of the world, dependent only on God and with nobody else above him. The monarch "at the apex of the state's structure", is "the permanent of its unity and continuity, the embodiment of the culture's values and the guarantor of the society's prosperity."²¹ The king's "work" is to convey his divine power to his people.

Supernatural power, *naam*, operating through the king, originates from a divine principle of celestial origin. *Naam* is independent of any person: it is the kingship and not the king who is divine.²² In olden times *naam* was vested in the royal ancestors. During his lifetime the king acts as the receptacle or holder of *naam*, which burdens him with great responsibility. The members of the royal family are not born as inherent possessors of *naam*, but this power is conveyed to every new king by the transmission of a mystic object, called *naam-tiibo*. In this *naam-tiibo*, it is said, resides the approval of the ancestors.²³ Therefore it plays an integral part in the cult of the royal ancestors, whose first priest is the king. As such he selects the animals destined to be

¹⁸ MÜLLER 1973:74:58; cf. SOME 1979:9

¹⁹ cf. HOCART 1941:2f.; 1979:97

²⁰ IZARD 1980:347-48

²¹ YOUNG, 1966:146

²² EVANS-PRITCHARD 1962:211

²³ IZARD 1992:8, 65

sacrificed and gives the order to kill them. The king, as representative of his people, addresses his offerings to his royal ancestors because they act as intermediaries to other supernatural powers. As original strangers in their territories, the rulers had to legitimise themselves. This ideological justification was obtained by constructing a close relationship to the sky or the sky-god. From this has come the king's moral right to be in office, and his main task is both to ensure enough rain while simultaneously keeping heavy rainfall away. So he is the sovereign ruler over the life and death of his subjects.

The king has dual responsibilities as clan head and territorial administrator, as head of the cult of the royal ancestors and the cult of the land, the one area where in many Mosi states his powers are incomplete without the co-operation of commoners.²⁴ In contrast, in the case of Tenkodogo the *naaba* also acts as main priest for the cult of the earth. As such the beginning of every new year, 63 days after the harvest feast (*basga*), he travels about 15 kilometres in the south-eastern direction of Tenkodogo, where a sacred hill is located. This hill has two "rooms" (*zondo*), one is said to be male (*kungtangdaogo*) and the other female (*kungtangpoko*). Accompanied by his vassals, he rides on his horse first to a small village called Signoghin. There, sitting under a *nere* tree (*roānga*, *Parkia biglobosa*), His Majesty is received by the population whose chief serves him water and *zoom-koom*, millet-flour dissolved in water. The king offers kola-nuts in return. Only after this traditional greeting the king is allowed to continue his way to Dossene, situated at the foot of the hill. There he orders the different animals to be killed, especially a three-year old "white" bull, whose blood is collected in a calabash. Blood, parts of the hide and the tail are carried, together with the blood of a ram, a cock and a guinea fowl, by the king and his servants to the "male" grotto near the top of the hill. Secondly, the *kungtangpoko* receives a sacrifice but without the blood of the bull. In this rite, the king thanks for a rich harvest and asks for another year of abundance, without mischief. The ceremony enables the subjects to beg the servants to cut them a branch of a tree that is common on the hill and grows near the grotto, so that its leaves cover the entrance. This tree, called *yilkaānga* (*Combretum micranthum*) which is in direct contact with the sanctuary, participates in its fecundating powers. The wife of a man who brings home a branch of this tree will conceive within the same year. But this is only true for branches cut on that special day when the king demonstrates his relationship to the sanctuary and the animal connected with it: the python.

As has been said, upon entering office the king is imbued with superhuman power. Every new sovereign is nominated and enthroned by a council constituted of four elders (*kasemdamba*) of lineages that are apparently older.²⁵ More important, however, is the *naam*, the spiritual power or force that summates the deeds of the royal ancestors and which is materialised in the

²⁴ cf. IZARD 1980:285, 315f.; 1992:11

²⁵ cf. KAWADA 1979:171f.

naam-tiibo. Every prince, all others being excluded a priori from succession, has the legal right to claim the power. But only the possession of this sacred object invests him with it and assures him the obedience of his subjects. Except for the king himself and five of his principal vassals (*zak-naaba*, *widi-naaba*, *wedkim-naaba*, *kirim-naaba* and *balum-naaba*), nobody is allowed to approach the *naam-tiibo*, to see, touch or mention it, nor even know anything about the substances it contains. The object is kept under the uppermost secrecy because its loss would be equivalent to the loss of the royal power. The handing over of the *naam-tiibo* to the designated successor in office therefore constitutes the essential phase of the long-drawn-out and symbolically loaded rites of enthronisation.²⁶ With the "eating" of the *naam-tiibo* the designated successor ceases to be human. He furthermore incarnates the heavenly power invested in his royal ancestors, so becoming the living symbol of the welfare of the community. Subsequently he changes his name that becomes part of his altered personality. The name the new king chooses on entering office, when staying in a house (*naam-roogo*) outside the palace called *fere*, is of high significance. Furthermore it is a magical formula that endows its owner with the qualities expressed in it. As representative of God and the ancestors, and "loaded" with the sum of all powers over life and fertility of his realm, the king is not only a sacred being but also the highest property of his people. Such a "treasure" has to be well protected and guarded. Therefore the king, certainly in former times, stayed isolated in his residence. There he lived among his many wives and small children, cared for by young pages "feminised" by their dress, controlled by an older and castrated house-steward (*zak-naaba*).²⁷ Pages and servants came principally from families excluded by their origins from the royal power which they could take over under no circumstances. They were often stigmatised by physical handicaps, for example some were stunted or humpbacked. One servant of the actual Tenkodogo-*naaba* has to be red-haired, because the diviners stated that such a person would bring luck to the king.

Ideally, the king should be the only perfect male in the palace. As small children, his sons were sent away to tutors. The eldest son had to leave the house at three years of age. If no extraordinary circumstances occurred, he was allowed to return only after the death of his father. The later-born sons would leave the palace aged seven or eight. In this way all persons who could contest the king's right to govern were banned in advance from his immediate surroundings. As it is expressed in a proverb: "Man is the death of man, the woman is his life."²⁸ The king, as a prisoner of his puissance, is subject to many rather severe and burdensome rules of behaviour. In former times, he was not even allowed to leave the palace. Nowadays, as customs decay, church visitors usually see him on Sundays. However, even here, he is

²⁶ SOME 1970:15

²⁷ IZARD 1992:13f

²⁸ IZARD 1985:108; IZARD 1992:55, 116

separated from the crowd, as he has a special place at the right side of the altar. On other days people might happen to meet him in a bar owned by one of his uncles or at the local cinema. For his father this freedom to move around was inconceivable. Traditionally loneliness was the king's destiny, and in the sense he resembles the sun standing alone at the firmament. With sunrise the king has to get up every morning to perform rites for the *naam-tiibo*. The *naaba* himself complained: "Every morning until I have performed ceremonies for the *naam-tiibo* I can receive no visitor."²⁹ Like the sacred object itself, these ceremonies concerning the *naam-tiibo* are subjected to great secrecy; even the "ministers" surrounding the king cannot or do not want to say how they are performed. During the later course of the morning the *naaba*, especially on Fridays, appears "in state" at the outer court, *samande*, of the palace and takes place in the centre of the *zãande*, the traditional assembly-hall. There he receives his "ministers", as well as his subjects, and settles official affairs. In former times the king was not only the highest judge, but also the greatest benefactor of his people. Still today the *naaba* is exceedingly generous and everybody who comes to greet him is well treated. He assists the poor and supports the blind and the lame. He must give the impression that he lives in abundance: his generosity stands symbolically for the wealth and welfare of the land. In his person all powers of fertility are concentrated, one single act of coition is sufficient for his wives to conceive: so it is not surprising that the king has many children. Among them there are often twins, for everybody a more than apparent sign of his great potency.

Also his physical appearance shows that he is the holder of the concentrated powers of life and fertility of his land and its people. Older accounts state that the weight of a Mosi king could be as much as three hundredweight.³⁰ As long as the *naaba* is corpulent and stout the favour of the supernatural rests upon him (similarly an English proverb says: "Good weight and measure is heaven's treasure"). So the corpulence of the king is not only considered a sign of beauty and dignity but furthermore guarantees the prospering and welfare of the land and the people."³¹

"Food is the language of social relations, and a fat and strong king is a powerful sign of prospering and good fortune."³² All qualities are epitomised in the king, who initiates and co-ordinates agricultural labour throughout the country by means of communal rites honouring the royal ancestors. Even though the person of the king appears rather impressive on "normal" days, he seems to grow in stature during festivities, when, as highest priest, he celebrates or initiates these rites which the survival of his subjects depends on. There is a rumour about his swallowing or rubbing effective "medicines", *tiinama*, into certain parts of his body, which at these important occasions let

²⁹ SOME 1979:16

³⁰ MÜLLER 1973-74:94

³¹ cf. SAHLINS 1992:32f.

³² RICHARDS 1939:51; cf. Müller 1973/74:94

him appear extremely strong and powerful. He is also wrapped in splendid garments, *gurmousse*, some of which were worn by his father or even grandfather. The king is the only person who is allowed to wear this kind of cloth. Corpulent and in full possession of his physical strength, distinctively dressed and richly adorned, the radiant splendour of the king surpasses the outward appearance of all other persons. His person must arouse envy: in fact some of his agnates are suspected of intending to cause him harm. Regarded with mistrust are mainly his father's brother's sons and grandsons. As first-born, his father's brother Tiibo would have been the "more legitimate" successor. But he was put in jail by the French colonialists in Ouagadougou, and because the office could not stay vacant the younger brother ascended to the throne.

A king, caught between his obligations to kin and country, always has enemies. Cabals, intrigues and plots are nowhere more common than at the royal court. Not everybody is honest or upright, as the earth is the playground of many antagonistic forces. So the universe releases both good and bad powers which, activated by men, can cause either positive or negative effects.³³ One only has to know the right procedure, and then every force can be bound and enclosed in so-called medicines (*tiinama*). Nearly everybody is the owner of some kind of "medicine" (*tiim*). At the court of the *naaba* all these "powers" are concentrated in the *naam-tibo*. Therefore he certainly is well protected, yet he must always look out for possible evil-doers. He handles his food and beverages with great care; always bearing in mind that one of his rivals might try to poison him. Therefore on most occasions the king eats alone.³⁴ His meals, always served with meat, a luxury which in former times only the king was able to afford, is prepared with special care by his favourite wives. Nothing he consumes should be polluted by coming in contact with strangers. The purity of the royal diet is associated with the power of the *naaba*. *Ri* (or *di*) means "to eat" as well as "having sexual relations" and is implicit in the metaphorical use of the verb in the meaning of "to govern over somebody".³⁵ By entering upon office the king devours his realm. Only on the unique occasion when the candidate ascends to power it is said: "the *naaba* eats." The physical necessity "to eat" is normally paraphrased by the sentence: *nab nɛgɛ ka be fuige*, "the hand of the king has no time". As nobody should see him eating, he usually eats alone. Not even on the occasion of the *basga*, the "final meal", does he take part in public consumption of the feast. If on the occasion of festivities celebrated away from the palace (for example *Bugum-yaoge* and *Gurg-tānga*) he has to eat or drink, one of his pages hides his face with a fan to make him invisible to the public. At his journeys, especially to the graves of the royal ancestors, the king only drinks *dāam*, millet-beer; he will never be served *zoom-koom*, the traditional drink of greeting by which every visitor is welcomed. As the *naaba* incorporates the realm he should not

³³ cf. IZARD 1980:347

³⁴ IZARD 1985:113f.

³⁵ IZARD 1980:417

be given *zoom-koom* because he nowhere appears as a stranger. The king stands beyond and above the different strata constituting the society, because he represents them all. Everybody recognises in him the values and virtues by which they define themselves, therefore he belongs to none of them.

Only on his way to the *Kurg-tānga* does he stop, as already mentioned, at Signoghin³⁶ and there is he given water and *zoom-koom*. As successor of the formerly stranger-conquerors he has to be welcomed by one of the representatives of the first occupants of the soil before he obtains admission to continue to the sanctuary.

Ideally the king appears to be "non- or superhuman". He always stays the same and remains unchangeable. Anything that could recall his human origin is obliterated. So nobody should see him when he washes or while he relieves himself. If, while appearing *coram publico*, he demonstrates his humanity by coughing or clearing his throat, every utterance is annulled or disguised by an audible finger-snapping of all those who are present. Generally, everything that came into contact with the king acquires qualities of blessing. To receive a gift from His Majesty is a sign of great honour. At the occasion of his Friday receptions he orders not only the distribution of millet-beer, *dāam*, but, although more rarely, kola-nuts. To get one is a sign of high distinction and a guarantee for good-luck.³⁷ Just as the calabash filled with beer must be emptied, so the nut must be chewed in the presence of the king. If anybody who takes anything to eat from the hands of the king is angry and plans mischief, he will consequently soon die. In such a case the *naaba's* present turns to be fatal, the blessing changing into disastrous forces.

Not only the king's gifts, but especially his person emanates dangerous powers. Formerly nobody was allowed to touch him or look at him directly. Still today his subjects throw themselves on the dusty ground without daring to raise their eyes. In particular, his glance is feared. Some people therefore refuse to come close to him; others try to avoid him on certain days. People say that the eyes of the king are similar to those of magicians and sorcerers, highly reddish and therefore quote the proverb: "if you do not know the *naaba*, you still know the fire", alluding to the fact that the king might be similarly all-consuming. Therefore it seems to be wiser to avoid his vicinity, since the sun cannot blind the person turning its back to it.

In any case, in former times there were not many occasions to see the monarch. Men who held no office at court and did not get into trouble rarely had an opportunity to come into contact with him, because only at fixed dates was the king allowed to leave the palace. These exceptions included certain festivities like the already mentioned *Kurg-tānga*, when he in his role as the first priest had to perform certain rites important for the correct course of the year. Another of these royal festivities is *Bugum-yaoge*, "at the tomb of Naaba

³⁶ "where it is good to descend", from *sigi* = to descend, *nooghe* = to stay well (meaning: abundance of food)

³⁷ cf. Drucker Brown 1975:42

Bugum", which takes place 21 days after the *basga* and 42 days before the *Kurg-tānga*. At the *Bugum-yaoge* the king leaves the palace to make a visit to the tomb of Naaba Bugum, the father of the founder of Tenkodogo, Naaba Sigri. As for the *Kurg-tānga* the monarch leaves his residence on the back of a white horse. On his way to the sanctuaries he wears his war-dress that let him appear unapproachable and unrecognisable. Neck and head are covered by a cloth of calico and on his head he wears his war-hat (*zuk-peogo*), demonstrating that the king is not only an agent of fertility, but also a fierce warrior. His veiled appearance reminds one of a nomadic Fulani or a marabout rather than of a paramount chief.

On special occasions, festivities such as the above mentioned and enthronisation rites, the king visits those fixed places of his realm that played a decisive role in local traditions concerning the genealogical history of his dynasty. Otherwise he was formerly not allowed to cross the frontiers of his realm. The only exception could be made after 33 years in office. 33 as intensification of the number 3, associated with men, is considered an extraordinary number. A king whose reign has lasted 33 years goes on a pilgrimage to Gambaga, where the tombs of his mythical ancestors are located. On his way there and back he reiterates the trails of his conquering ancestors. Before leaving to Gambaga he travels to Kukiama, today a small but genealogically important place. There he mounts another sacred hill (*Tiragū*) before he bathes in a sacred river called Woore and visits the chief of Kukiama.³⁸ Rejuvenated and invested with new strength he returns to his residence and starts his period of reign from the beginning again.

Other opportunities for the *naaba* to leave the palace were formerly given by military expeditions. However, the king did not ride ahead of his men but held himself, especially when the situation became dangerous, safely in the background, well-protected and shielded by his closest and most intimate vassals. Thus the king was considered less as a potential fighter but rather as a kind of relic, whose positive powers should influence the outcome of the battle in their favour. To protect the monarch from any kind of menacing danger he was provided with all sorts of "medicines" and talismans. Should any risky situation emerge, the vassals tried to take him to security as quickly as possible. Meanwhile two of his commanders-in-chief, *tabrana* and *tengsoba* with their men, were strictly forbidden to turn their back to the enemies. Indefatigable and undaunted they had to face death. Even if their lives were seriously endangered, they were forbidden to retreat.

Even though it could happen that a king lost his life in war, he could be sure that his ancestors in the afterworld would receive him with great honours. As the ruler undertook every extension of his sovereignty to enlarge their fame and glory, they held him in a high esteem. His descendants also praised a king who lost his life in war, the drummers, *benda*, commemorate his deeds, and blood sacrifices are offered at his tomb. If the *naaba* has so-to-say "nothing to

³⁸ Cf. KAWADA 1979:68f.

lose" (except his life) by dying in battle, his sudden death is considered a disaster for the land and for the people. Therefore people were extremely cautious that nothing would happen to the king; every injury of his good health endangered both the existence of the community and more significantly the order of life in general. As long as the king felt well, was healthy and strong, and did not transgress the order of the world, the fertility of earth, cattle and people was guaranteed and rains would fall abundantly, a rich harvest would be expected, and nobody would be threatened by calamities of any kind. In former times the king's destiny was an infallible indicator of the value of powers concentrated in him as well as of the fate of the land and the people. Nobody therefore would comment on his physical necessities, like eating, drinking, defecation, because that would demonstrate his human nature. One also abstained from any remark concerning his physical condition. He could be well or feel sick, but for his subjects he had to remain unchangeable.

If the king suffers, land and people too are weakened. Should anybody pronounce that the king is ill, he is nearly or already dead.³⁹ Even in the latter case one does not state "the king is dead" but paraphrases this "disaster" by the words *naab le ba a zōnge*, which means "the king has returned to his house". The king (in his corporate form) never dies. The realm continues and has to be protected. To fight anarchy and dissolution, the dead king must be buried as fast as possible and be immediately replaced. During the unavoidable period of transition a substitute - or *locum tenens* - has to represent the dead king. This role (*kurita*) is played in Tenkodogo by a daughter of the deceased; a district-chief (the *Weged-naaba*) is represented by one of his servants, the *sogon-kasma* or "main page". Dressed in clothing of the dead king, the substitute holds office as if nothing had happened or changed. A reason for giving the office of intermediary to a daughter of the dead king (or a servant) might have been that she, as a female, (and he as former slave) could under no circumstance take possession of the *naam-tiibo* and so occupy the office permanently. After all the election of a new ruler was no easy affair. Severe struggles for power amongst sons of different wives of the king and their cousins as applicants to the "throne" were very common.

Meanwhile the dead king was buried. The rituals celebrated for him were not only shorter but completely different from the funerals held for commoners.⁴⁰ Not only was his body buried immediately, but his corpse also had to undergo a very special treatment. His hands and feet were pierced with sharp thorns of the *keglga*-tree (*Balanites aegyptiaca*). His eyes and his mouth were sealed with thorns of the same tree, in total 333 (!). By this act one tried to prevent the escape of the inherent, potentially very dangerous forces still in the dead king. At the same time the irreversibility of the separation was underlined. People state: "The hands of the dead king were perforated so he

³⁹ IZARD 1980:430; IZARD 1985:120

⁴⁰ Concerning royal funerals cf. IZARD 1980:422ff.

could not beat anymore if somebody did something wrong, the thorns in his feet would hinder him from moving, the mouth was shut so that he could not call or utter any curse on anybody, and his eyes were closed to prevent him from seeing." After this treatment the grave-diggers did not lower the corpse, which was sewn into the hide of a *molfo* (bush-buck?)⁴¹ on which former chiefs during their life-time used to sleep, slowly and gently into the shovelled-out hole. Instead they laid the corpse on one side and pushed it roughly in the grave. The grave was then covered with fragments of laterite (*piisere*). After three days these stones were lifted and it was inspected how the corpse now laid in the grave. From its position further events could be foreseen. According to the manner in which the earth had accepted the corpse further events concerning the life of the community could be foreseen, whether either more deaths would follow or the land would be exposed to other misfortunes such as famines or epidemic diseases. For the last time the dead king, not yet in the position of an ancestor, decided the fate of his land and its people. Had the corpse fallen in a "wrong" way, people threw *kankasago*⁴², millet-stalks burnt to ashes, into the grave, which was then finally closed with a rock. So, even after the death of the king, the flourishing and prospering of the nation depended on him albeit three days. How much more must this have been true for the living ruler! If he demonstrated any sign of weakness or diminishing of his strength (expressed primarily through the fact that he could no longer satisfy his wives), he should choose a voluntary death as natural consequence. A first indication of his progressing decay was given by certain "magical objects" called *tiipoya*⁴³. These objects were (and are) placed in a special house in the interior of the palace where they hung from the ceiling. If they should have come to hang lower one had to conclude that they inclined to the earth and therefore the grave. They indicated that the life of the *naaba* was in real danger. Thereupon the king, or his servants, would consult many diviners, who would counsel different remedies. Should the hanging objects then move higher, the calamity seemed to be prevented. Should they remain unchanged or even fall lower, the *naaba's* end was near.

So that his physical decay did not endanger the kingdom and therefore affect the general well-being of the community, he should depart as intact as possible: he should take poison. Should he refuse to withdraw himself voluntarily from life, he disgraced the honour of his ancestors, who might even refuse to receive him with dignity in the other world. So the priority is given to the welfare of the land and the people; the personal interests of the king must therefore be subjugated. As with the diminishing of the *naaba's* physical vitality, if the fertility of the land seemed to be exhausted, his death became the only appropriate remedy.

⁴¹ cf. RATTRAY 1932, I:175

⁴² *kakore* = stalk, *saaga* = broom

⁴³ *tiim*, medicine, and *poya*, to know what is going to happen

One of the predecessors of the present ruler, Naaba Yāmbweogo (or *Gigemde*), is said to have attained a very old age. People claim that he was in office for 44 years. But at the end of his reign the land was afflicted by several calamities: famine threatened the people and epidemics spread, infallible signs that his powers began to wane. He no longer could perform his role properly. Apparently Naaba Yāmbweogo was not willing to bring relief by his own actions. So the elders at the court decided that, to protect land and people from further mischief, he should be dethroned. Consequently he was exiled from Tenkodogo.⁴⁴ A new king who was in full possession of his physical powers was elected. This seems to be the only known case when a king was forced to abdicate. One of Yāmbweogo's sons later created problems in the area because he claimed to be the rightful heir. This led to bloody battles. Another former king, Naaba Konjogpiiga, even seems to be excluded from the ancestral genealogy. He completely vanishes in the dark of history probably because he was an unjust king, who abused his power to steal and seduce the wives of his subordinates. Therefore he was chased from Tenkodogo; neither his name nor his tomb are venerated.⁴⁵

On the whole only a virtuous king is a blessing for his people. The central idea of the agrarian ideology rests upon the responsibility of the king for the existence and living standards of his subjects and beyond to the rightful order of the world. This order substantially depends on the exact observance of the traditional way of life, at the centre of which lies the *naaba* in his role of high priest of his community, fulfilling the different ceremonies which are distributed over the year. At these occasions the king calls the attention of various supernatural powers, mainly his ancestors, to the benefit of the land and its people. Life-giving ritual, not politics, mainly in former times, brought the people together.

The royal ancestors are eminently important because it is they who act as intermediaries to the divinities. Their main task consists in drawing from the sky-god the fertilising rain. Therefore on several occasions they receive offerings from the king, especially at the height of the agrarian year when the harvest and new year festivities are celebrated. Before the ancestors taste the first fruits, their consumption is strictly forbidden to the king. Should he regardlessly, either by neglect or by mistake, transgress this rule, he would not survive the coming year. Above all seasonal food taboos include those of different millet products. For other fruits first meals also have to take place; in the month of April, for example, the *toeribo*, the eating of the fresh baobab-leaves; in August, the *bengeribo*, when for the first time the leaves of beans, together with gombo, are consumed. The interdiction to eat food containing parts of the different newly grown millet varieties starts in September, at the moment when the millet in the fields begins to ripen and lasts until November

⁴⁴ KAWADA 1979:92f.; 1985:216. As far as I know, Naaba Yāmbweogo only reigned for some months.

⁴⁵ Except in a secret rite connected with the sacrifice at the tomb of Naaba Bugum.

when at a short interval of 21 days the king celebrates two festivities centring around the consummation of the new harvest. First he eats porridge (*sagbo*) prepared from the grains of red sorghum (*kazenga*). This non-public ceremony is called *kazeeg-diligre*, "eating the *kuzenga*". At this occasion the king orders two rams to be sacrificed, one at the tomb of his grandfather, the other at the tomb of his father. In the interior of the palace a bull is killed at a place called Suraoghin in honour of all the *tengama* (earth sanctuaries). This meat he shares among his vassal-chiefs who come to greet him. On that day the king's wives keep the old millet separately from the new grain, which means they serve two separate dishes. With the meal millet-beer brewed from the grain of the old harvest is served.

Then three or six weeks later the *naaba* celebrates with great pomp his *basga*, the final "first-meal" of the year. On that occasion he is finally allowed to drink *dāam* (millet-beer made from the grains of red sorghum) and to eat guinea-fowl that was born during the preceding rainy season. To exclude any possible danger emanating from a transgression of his food taboos the king renounces completely meals containing meat of guinea-fowl during the risky period. Any possible rival could easily try to harm the king. The millet of the new harvest only is allowed to enter the palace after the celebration of the *basga*. The afore-mentioned taboos are still observed by the present ruler. His father, furthermore, is said to have avoided drinking water, fearing it could have come down with the August/September rains, which would mean it consisted of heavenly semen. With the *basga*, a joyful festivity by which the king thanks his ancestors for a good year, all these restrictions come to an end. The *basga* furthermore offers the occasion to state demands and to formulate promises for the coming year, for example for the harvest to become more plentiful, bountiful, and rich. Therefore the *basga* is directed to all supernatural powers which are considered responsible for the welfare of the king and through him also for his people.

The ceremonies start on a Thursday. Visitors, among them the high commissioner and the "préfet", arrive at the palace to wish the king a good year (*ne tābo*) and to deliver their gifts, mainly chickens and nowadays money. In the evening, the drummers cite the genealogy of the kings' ancestors (*singre* and *sogobo*). The instruments are guarded by small boys. The drummers come back early in the morning to repeat the genealogical recitation. The main activities take place on this Friday, a so-called "great Friday", which means a Friday when market is held at Tenkodogo. Markets are held on every third day. The morning ceremonies start very early in the interior of the palace where thanks are expressed to certain spiritual powers that are entrusted with the personal protection of the king. The first offering goes to the *naam-tiibo*. Next the small procession continues to the *zak-wende*, the shrine erected for the tutelary genius of the court that is always established in the middle of the yard of the kings' first wife (*pukiema*), who is often inherited from his predecessor. Then the shrines of *kinkirsi* (twins) receive their share. Only when all the supernatural powers residing in the interior of

the palace and entrusted specially with the welfare of the king are satisfied, the *naaba* gives orders to begin the sacrifices at the tombs. The event now shifts from the interior to the exterior. The chief sacrificer, accompanied by his colleagues in office, leaves the traditional entrance at the side and directs their path to a place in the middle of the street leading from the palace-gate to the market-place. There he sacrifices in the direction of the small village of Godin. In Godin the tomb and the former residence of Naaba Bugum are located, the father of the founder of Tenkodogo, Naaba Sigri.

Naaba Bugum therefore played the decisive role in establishing the ruling dynasty and the creation of their own identity, differentiating them from all other Mosi. Due to his importance Naaba Bugum has his own festivity, the already mentioned *Bugum-yaoge*.

From the middle of the street, the small party continues to the different tombs of the nine successors of Naaba Bugum. They all are buried in the near or more distant environment of the palace. Naaba Sigri, the founder of Tenkodogo, is the only one who is honoured by a stone-framed grave that is located close to the marketplace. But as it is now to be found in front of a store selling salt, a lorry must have touched it at one corner so that it has fallen into decay. All the other graves are simply marked by stones. They are located in rather "strange" corners. For example, one lies in the middle of a garbage heap, another one in a newly reaped millet field, others in the yards or close to the houses of the king's servants. The proceeding of the ceremonies at all these places is more or less the same. The first offering always consists of water and *zoom-koom*, millet-flour dissolved in water. With this gift the dead are welcomed. Until the end of the ceremony they dwell among the living, but at the end of his funeral each deceased becomes a stranger. Only on special occasions the dead are present to receive offerings and to return strengthened to their realm of the dead. Reconciled with their offspring and satisfied one more time, they are willing to fulfil the demands which are formulated at their tombs. The *zoom-koom* is prepared by the king's "first" wife (*pukiema*). In Tenkodogo as in Ouagadougou the water was prepared by using the millet of two different harvests: part of the grain comes from the first ears harvested that year and part from those of the previous year. This is supposed "to symbolise the continuity between crops, mirroring the continuity between the ruler and his ancestors."⁴⁶ During the libation and the following sacrifice, generally of a white cock, the *yao-naaba* ("tomb-naaba"), as delegate of His Majesty, cites the different requests of the king. He states the following:

"God I beg your pardon,
Those under the earth (ancestors) I beg your pardon,
God I ask your permission,
Ancestors of Naaba Tigre I ask your permission,
To ask the earth for health.
Today is the day celebrating the custom,

⁴⁶ SKINNER 1964:127

The *naaba* has received new things,
 He has received a cock and a guinea-fowl,
 Both he has brought to ask the ancestors for health.
 He asks for the health of everybody.
 He asks the ancestors to withdraw drinking-water (rain) from the sky.
 The *naaba* brings these offerings in the name of everybody.
 Exempt us from people bearing evil in mind
 Who rise to harm the *naaba*.
 God might chase them,
 Thereby the festivities might end in good health,
 Thereby everybody might take health home with him.
 Health for everybody at the court, Health for the children,
 Health for the *naaba*'s vassals,
 Health for his aunts and sisters.
 He who celebrates this festival asks for the health of everyone.
 He asks for success, happiness, wealth and a long life,
 Thereby the *naaba* will be content also in the coming year
 And holds again something in his hands that he might give you.
 The *naaba* greets the ancestors for they have done well."

The *yao-naaba* kills the cock by cutting its throat and letting its blood flow on the stone of sacrifice (*maan-kugri*). The carcass, twitching in its death-agony, is thrown into the air. Those who are present anxiously watch the fall of the bird. Thereby they recognise if the ancestors are really disposed to accept the following sacrifice, including the demands of their descendants. Should the cock fall on its back and its breast and stomach - as seat of the entrails containing life-maintaining food - point towards the sky (which is, by sending the rain, the life-giving agent), people take it as a positive sign. If the bird has fallen favourably (which is usually the case), one of the small boys who are present hurries to pick up the carcass and hands it over to the sacrificer. The *yao-naaba* pulls out some feathers and dips them into the blood, which is slowly drying on the stone of sacrifice. He breaks the cock's legs: the left to eliminate all evil intended by women, then the right leg to destroy every mischief planned by or originating from men. The *yao-naaba* then kills a guinea-fowl, and its blood is shed over the *maan-kugri*. Then - now without any previous oracle - he places a few of the bird's feathers on the stone. The final offering consists of millet-beer, which was also prepared by the king's first wife. In the same manner, the sacrificer moves from tomb to tomb until finally only the three immediate predecessors of the present ruler remain unsatisfied. Cult focuses on these royal tombs.

It is now about 11 o'clock, and the king and his attendants leave the palace personally to assist the ceremonial acts at the graves of the great-grand-father, grand-father and father of the present *naaba*. The offerings now increase, become more valuable, and bestow the king with a greater prestige. Besides the already mentioned gifts at the tombs of these immediate ancestors, a ram and a young bull are additionally sacrificed. During the different phases of the

basga, the king changes his garments; now he wears a black dress which symbolises dead and the memory of the past. Beside the blood and a piece of the hide taken from the neck of the animal, small parts of the meat and especially the vital-forces containing liver as well as the tail of the bull are deposited on the stone of sacrifice. One part of the meat is distributed raw, another part will be eaten on the next day in the interior of the palace by the male members of the king's family, the palace-officials and all district and village heads who come to assist the *basga* and thereby honour their king by greeting him and presenting their gifts to him (*naa-pusem*).

As soon as the sacrifice is finished, the ruler returns to his palace, to appear again dressed in red, the colour of the blood-shedding warrior and the victorious sun. He takes his place in the middle of the *zaande*, surrounded by the people of his court and the different ministers and guests who came for his praise. The drummers (*benda*) recite the royal genealogy, beginning with the mythological ancestors and leading up to the reign of the present king, Naaba Tigre, thus listing his noble descent.

The significance of the king as permanent benefactor of his people is shortly and clearly expressed in the last verse of these praise-songs, which states:

"May God confer duration to the impermanent river,
Thus the toads may divert themselves in its waters.
May the good stinging mud-fish let last the impermanent river,
Thus the toads may divert themselves in its waters."⁴⁷

The toads symbolise the humble subjects, who desire to spend their life peacefully both under the protection of God as well as under the guardianship of the king, the indeed kind-hearted but nevertheless dangerous fish of prey. This can only be possible if both, God by accomplishing the demands of the *naaba* through the mediation of his ancestors, and the king by his proper behaviour, care for the urgently needed water, which preserves the life of his subjects. Insofar as the welfare of the community depends upon the monarch, in his person its rise or decline is vested.

⁴⁷ KAWADA 1985:241

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